

David Green

Book Review

The Essential Practitioner's Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology

edited by Fay Fransella

London: Wiley, 2005, Paperback, 308 pages, £26.99

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reviewed by

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This book is an interesting byproduct of a much more substantial tome, the recently published *International Handbook of Personal Construct Psychology* (also edited by Fransella). The avowed aim of this shortened edition is to boil down the original's contents into a nutritious meal fit for the proverbial hard-pressed practitioner. Fransella candidly admits in the preface that this initiative for a Mark 2 version came from the publisher Wiley rather than the editor herself, so we might reasonably suppose that a cheaper shorter publication was also designed to attract a wider readership than its weighty progenitor. The risk in this eminently understandable strategy is that chapters that were not initially written with the practitioner audience in mind don't 'hit the mark' as well as a purpose-built volume might have done.

The *Essential Practitioner's Handbook* is organised in four sections. It starts with three 'What's it all about?' chapters including a characteristically feisty piece by Don Bannister entitled 'The Logic of Passion' that challenges the traditional separation of intellect and emotion.

The middle two sections look to provide the practical heart of the publication by describing a range of PCP assessment techniques followed by 16 separate contributors reporting various ways in which they have employed PCP ideas to promote change in a range of clinical and organizational contexts. In the techniques section the chapters on grid use (by Bell) and mapping patterns of de-

pendency (by Walker) are models of clarity that probably could leave a busy practitioner with a sense of "I can see when I could do that". Denicolo's piece on using more qualitative approaches to PCP assessment also succeeds in equipping the novice reader with some immediately useable tricks of the PCP trade. It is not so easy to pass on the nous needed to make effective interventions in the complicated lives of individuals and organizations – especially when, as with Procter's chapter on family therapy, you have less than four pages to get your message across. For example Sewell's account of his use of PCP principles in the treatment of PTSD might well intrigue a fellow therapist to read more, but I doubt even experienced practitioners in the field could find a way to immediately embrace the ideas conveyed in this format.

The final section is a brief two chapter 'Whither PCP?' conclusion. Ironically for a psychology that so celebrates our capacity for anticipation I found these forward looking musings oddly uninspiring. Neimeyer and Baldwin wryly report how fashionable constructivist ideas have now become in psychotherapeutic circles, though whether Kelly himself would have enjoyed this postmodern company is a moot point. Fransella's finale considers future extensions of the range of convenience of PCP beyond its traditional territory of applied professional psychology into the fields of music, history and even the construing

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capacity of plants. However I doubt that piano players and organic gardeners were quite the hard-pressed practitioners that Wiley had in mind as potential purchasers of this volume.

So what do you get for your money? A solid up-to-date PCP resource book that is well-referenced and includes helpful appendices covering technical terms and directing readers to more specialist publications in the field. Something of a whistle-stop tour of the range of ways PCP has been applied to applications in a wide range of settings. All this represents a useful contribution to the field – it’s just not what I would term a practitioner’s handbook. I know I get some of the same reaction when traditional academic events purport to be workshops. Ah well it wouldn’t do if we all used our constructs the same way...

REFERENCES

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(Retrieved from <http://www.pcp-net.org/journal/pctp05/green-fransella05.pdf>)

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Received: 19 Oct 2005 - Accepted: 19 Oct 2005 - Published: 1 Nov 2005